

Joe G. Stevens, President

NOVEMBER 29, 1973

VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

VOL. III NO. I

We have lost one of our most valuable members and friend in the death of E. D. Ferrell. He loved history of all areas, but especially seemed partial to local history. He sent a story about Ocean Pond, along with pictures, just a few weeks before he entered the hospital. We shall miss him, but will always remember him in the friendship he gave, in the words he spoke to us, and in the excellent stories he left behind.

Discovering Georgia.

I often wondered why I like to visit old cemeteries and found the answer in words written at the Andersonville prison site. It was something like this: Standing among the silent headstones, do you realize how unpressing the moment becomes? And something about the calming, unhurried effect of a visit to a cemetery.

Andersonville, Georgia, U. S. A. is a new book by Georgia author, Peggy Sheppard. Lonie, Susie and I met Mrs. Sheppard at the New Books and Authors Luncheon in Atlanta on November 2 at the Georgia Writers Association Annual Conference, sat next to her and spoke after her. Her book, in attractive red, white, and blue, is a complete history of the town including the present. Andersonville Prison began in February 1864, the same month and year the Hollidays were moving to Lowndes County, when later that same year Sherman caused many people to evacuate to Valdosta. That's all we can thank him for. Mrs. Sheppard, culinary writer for Georgia Magazine, is a very capable historian and presents the story of Andersonville in an interesting manner.

Andersonville today is still a very small place. We visited a flea market set up on the main street, walking from table to table. At an intersection was the monument to Captain Henry Wirz.. The inscription reads: "Captain Henry Wirz, C. S. A. Confederate Hero - Martyr. Died Nov. 10, 1865." Captain Wirz was the keeper of the prison.

The cemetery, within two miles of the town, is really covered with small white headstones, and there are monuments from several northern states. Nearby, the prison park is vacant except for black wrought iron fences around wells and escape holes of the prisoners, and there are more monuments to different people, including Clara Barton.

At one time the prison held 33,000 prisoners on 26 acres of Georgia land. The prisoners were not provided with shelter or sanitary facilities. When the north refused to exchange prisoners and supplies were cut off to the south, the northern prisoners began to die. In the end, 13,000 had died. A man and his wife were brought there and they later had a baby. All three survived. It was interesting to learn that the Southern Masons tried to help the Mason prisoners with gifts of food and clothing, and that raiders within the prison were tried by their own prison-mates in kangaroo court and executed.

Major Holliday had been a very active Mason, and we wondered if he were one of the ones who shared what he had with the northern prisoners.

After the visit to Andersonville we motored to and through Americus. It is a beautiful town with surrounding hills and woods. There are many old and beautiful homes in Americus -- and all restored! Americus is the county seat of Sumter County, and they have a new, modern courthouse.

The Autographing Tea

On Sunday, November 11, Frances Dekle and her committee entertained Susie and Albert at an autographing tea at the LCHS Museum. Nearly a hundred people attended, quite a number of copies of In Search of the Hollidays were sold, and a number of memberships, some new, were received. Besides visitors from Valdosta and Lowndes County, they came from Madison, Quitman, Tifton and Cartersville.

A young man, his wife and two small children walked into the Museum. He said his name was Dan Holliday, that he was stationed at Moody, lived in Hahira and was from South Carolina where there are a lot of Hollidays. Mrs. Holliday said her husband was a marksman and went to all the "shoots", and that everyone called him "Doc" Holliday. This young couple spent some time with us and we hope they will come back for we are sure they are some of "our" Hollidays.

The Lost City, Continued.

The article from which I quoted last month about the Lost City, went on to tell about "Another of Nature's Puzzles."

But even yet, we are not done with the mysteries of this strange section of the country. Five miles above the forgotten city is another puzzle, but this time it is one of nature's making without the help of man. It may, or may not, have had something to do with the location of its neighbor in the ancient city. Certain it is that the wonder of it has perplexed the brains of the many generations of white men who have lived thereabouts. At the point named, five miles above the forgotten town, the Withlacoochee river is about 500 feet wide, and flows over a bed of quicksand. Then comes a long stretch of swamp, and then a steep bluff. At the edge of the latter, a part of the river, some hundred and fifty feet wide, leaves the main current, flows directly eastward at right angles to the course of the river, and plunges into a cavern in the face of a hill that is at least 100 feet high.

From time to time vain attempts have been made to thoroughly explore this weird retreat of the waters. One courageous man succeeded in penetrating the cave to a depth of 300 yards. In traversing this short distance, he passed through a series of spacious chambers, connected by narrow galleries, through which the water roared and dashed at headlong speed. The course of this underground stream is marked by a succession of sink holes for over a mile.

Then these cease, but a few miles lower down, on the opposite side of the river, a great limestone spring bursts out upon the surface. As a rule, the water of this spring is as clear as crystal. Whenever there is an unusual freshet, however, the water becomes clouded, so that it would seem that the underground stream from which the spring emerges must have some surface connection. This mysterious spring is in a direct line with the underground stream and it is believed the stream divides in the cave, or near it, part of its waters flowing down below the main channel of the river, crossing to the opposite side and emerging again at the spring.

There is another strange thing about this mysterious region. Geologically speaking, the country would seem to be of comparatively recent formation. Yet from the pre-historic evidences scattered about, it is proven to have been old enough to have supported generations of ancient races, so very ancient as to be utterly unknown, not even the most ancient of the known races having the least clue to its identity. The oversight that has left these mounds undisturbed for so long is as mysterious, almost, as the rest of this strange region.

The above article appeared in the Valdosta Times, April 22, 1905. In the December 16, 1927 issue of The Valdosta Daily Times, there appeared an article describing Valdosta and Lowndes County. It was written by Mrs. D. V. Baker and it ended with this paragraph:

It is said that in 1849 there was still to be seen near Troupville, the remains of an older town, whose origin is unknown, but probably dates back to prehistoric times. Large live oak trees flourished in the same locality and the idea of their spontaneous growth was precluded by the straight and uniform rows in which they were set, but who could have

placed them there is a mystery unsolved by time. It is quite possible, suggests Lucian Lamar Knight, that an old Spanish town was located there before the days of Oglethorpe.

If I understand all this correctly, there seem to be two lost cities. Now why can't we all get out and look for them?

Up the Withlacoochee.

I believe it would be more correct to say that we went down the Withlacoochee. My son-in-law, Larry Allen, is interested in all that we write about and has been to the river on many occasions. He promised to take me, show me an old swimming hole and see what more we could explore. We did quite a bit.

On Thanksgiving Day, the two of us in his Bronco headed for the River. Just off North Valdosta Road we turned down a clay road which is parallel to I-75. We turned off roads and traveled through brushy territory until we came to the river. There was a boat landing and swimming hole at the edge of a dark wide river. It was much wider and deeper than I thought it would be. Green palmetto bushes were everywhere. We were about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the trestle, where the Southern Railway tracks cross the Withlacoochee River. I had been told that that spot was another possible swimming hole place and wanted to see that too, if it were accessible.

We found a trail which could possibly lead us to the trestle. And here we went; a four wheel Bronco, down a one wheel trail. When it wasn't downhill to a mud hole, it was uphill to some thankful dry ground. We stopped once, talked to some hunters, walked on for a few yards and decided to bring the Bronco as far as it would travel. I walked on as Larry returned for the vehicle. The river was on my left for quite a while, but soon disappeared as the trail led away from it. I was quite alone as I sidestepped water holes and trudged through the dry ground and palmettoes. I soon saw the high mound of the railroad track to my right, and just as I sighted the long creosoted poles of the trestle, and a squirrel ran across my path, Larry caught up with me.

The white sand up and down the trestle at the river was probably brought in. But the milky looking water reminded me of the "limestone spring" and "clouded" water mentioned in the newspaper article. The river was very shallow there, could have been a swimming hole and is probably passable in a jeep or motor bike. But we decided not to chance it. We were only a few hundred yards from the crossing at Gornto Road. We returned the way we had come, blazing a trail through much brush and the same mud holes. We came to low places that, in the rainy seasons and high water times, must have made good size streams. At any rate, I went some places I'd never been before and saw the Withlacoochee in many picturesque spots.

We crossed over I-75, rode up Snake Nation Road and explored another section I'd never been. We came to another river. We didn't walk up a high bluff to get to it, but believe the high bluff in the article in the October letter is somewhere near. Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Richardson told us at the Tea that they believed the high bluff to be on the Little River for they had found one there once. When Larry and I stopped at the Little River we were high above it. Both banks are high above the water. The river is much larger than I had thought it to be. It was late and getting cold, but we vowed to return to look for the high bluff, a lost city or two, and more swimming holes.

Discovering Lowndes County is almost as much fun as wondering where your next bump in coming from in a Bronco. And you don't have long to wonder.

Next Meeting.

Our next meeting is November 29 at the Museum. Come early, bring something to share with the crowd.

Albert S. Pendleton, Jr.